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UNCLAS KABUL 002457

DEPT FOR AFGHAN ELECTIONS TASK FORCE

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SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: Afghan Elections Situation Report Twelve - 1200 Local,
August 21, 2009

11. (SBU) The next sitrep is scheduled for 1600 local on August 21.

Atmospherics

12. (U) Reuters reported at 9:45 AM local time that Karzai's campaign chief, Deen Mohammad, announced that Karzai was winning and a run-off would not be necessary. Shortly thereafter Mohammad confirmed to us that he had indeed spoken with Reuters, but had given his personal opinion. He told Reuters that based on numbers reported by Karzai observers in the field on Election Day, Karzai appeared to be winning and in Mohammad's own view, the election might not need to go to a second round. He also told the reporter that it's the duty of the IEC to announce the official results.

13. (U) Provincial reports by region follow:

RC South:

South Region IEC coordinator Qahir Wasifi reported that all 262 planned polling stations in Kandahar province were open yesterday. Only two international observer teams - both representing Democracy International - visited polling stations. KPRT received unconfirmed reports that both Karzai and Abdullah supporters engaged in campaign activities at polling stations in Kandahar City. In contrast to the general reports of low voter turnout, there are unconfirmed reports of high turnout in certain districts, such as Dand and Panjwayi. Unconfirmed reports indicate that the women's participation was low across the province.

RC-East:

Laghman: The provincial capital of Mehtarlam appears peaceful, with some post-election unrest in Alingar District (see security section). PRT rep interviewed six Mehtarlam locals who said they were proud to have voted, and very pleased at the relatively peaceful election day. All spontaneously expressed support for Karzai.

RC North:

-- Balkh Province: PRT Mazar-e Sharif reported anecdotally that two male voters who participated in the previous presidential election thought this election was better managed than the last, citing better quality ink, better security, and no improper influence over votes. Both voters were confident that the elections process would be deemed fair and impartial.

-- IEC vote counters at the Aybak Boys School in Samangan consistently held the presidential ballots up for inspection to observers. Two hundred and sixteen presidential ballots were deemed invalid because voters did not place a mark in the ballot and it remained blank, and some voters checked multiple boxes of various candidates.

-- Dr. Abdullah surpassed the competition at Aybak Boys School Voting Center, winning 68 percent of the male ballots cast. Karazi won 32 percent of the votes.

RC West:

-- Nothing new to report.

RC Central:

-- Nothing new to report.

Voter Turnout

¶4. (U) Provincial reports by region follow:

RC South:

-- Nothing new to report.

RC East:

-- Laghman: PRT reported it still has no reliable count of voter turnout. The provincial IEC representative declined to comment. Anecdotal, turnout appears to have been good in Mehtarlam but may have been substantially lower in outlying districts.

RC North:

-- Nothing new to report.

RC West:

-- Nothing new to report.

RC Central:

-- Nothing new to report.

Security

¶5. (U) Provincial reports by region follow:

RC South:

-- Nothing new to report.

RC East:

-- Ghazni PEO Rahimi called PRT Ghazni for urgent assistance early morning of August 21 at the Zana Khan District Center, claiming it was under attack. He claimed 40 people inside (including 2 injured people) were in danger and that the election materials they had with them might be destroyed. Polish Task Force White Eagle sent an air-ground Quick Reaction Force (QRF) to Zana Khan and determined that no fighting was in progress.

-- PRT Bamyan reported that fourteen relatively minor, but unspecified, security incidents related to the election occurred August 19 and 20 at the Ish Pesta valley located in Kahmard District and in the Ghandak valley, Shibar District.

-- In Laghman Province, PRT reported one attack in Qarghayi District on a polling site at a school near National Route 1, with small arms fire targeting a polling center after it closed. No injuries or damage to materials reported.

-- There were two incidents of elections-related violence in Alingar District. In the first incident, angry locals allegedly blocked a convoy carrying materials from their village and broke several boxes of ballots (after counting). No injuries were reported. In the second incident, an ANP vehicle escorting an elections convoy struck a land mine with no injuries or damages to materials reported.

RC North:

-- Nothing new to report.

RC West:

-- Nothing new to report.

RC Central:

-- Nothing new to report.

Voting & Counting Activities

16. (U) Seven teams from Embassy Kabul observed the counting phase at polling stations. The IEC's late instructions that polling stations be kept open an extra hour caused confusion at many sites, where managers had already closed stations and sealed boxes at around 4 PM. At some stations, ballot boxes had to be reopened, but seal numbers were carefully recorded. The schedule change caused counting to go long into the night. Where electricity flickered on and off, poll workers used battery-powered lanterns to count ballots. At one well-secured mosque in an old mud-bricked Hazara neighborhood of West Kabul, an ANP policeman was eager to go home, but he was unable to convince the polling center manager to hurry his meticulous preparations for counting.

-- Embassy observers reported poll workers generally followed counting procedures, and observers witnessed few irregularities in counting. Observer and candidate agent presence was heavy.

-- Final turnout appeared to be moderate. Karzai "won" at some polling stations, with Abdullah earning higher vote totals at others.

17. (U) Provincial reports by region follow:

RC South:

-- Nothing new to report.

RC East:

-- Paktika PEO Taj Ali reports that not all stations in Paktika completed the process of counting and tabulating ballots after polls closed yesterday. Ballot boxes were secured in place by ANSF until

this morning, when counting across the province resumed around 8:00 AM. Taj Ali said he made this decision last night after DFCs reached out to him seeking a delay given that widespread AAF threats necessitated the shifting of ANSF assets away from polling sites throughout the province. Taj Ali said he informed IEC-Kabul of this course of action, and told PRT that limited counting occurred last night in more secure district centers, including the population centers of Orgun, Bermel, and Sarobi.

-- Taj Ali is hopeful that most polling sites in Paktika would complete tabulation by noon on August 21. In areas with high voter turnout, such as Khair Kot, tabulation is expected to extend into the afternoon. Only Shakhelabad district has completed counting. Taj Ali told PRT that counting has gone smoothly this morning, with no security incidents perpetrated against polling sites or staff. The process is on track to have all results returned to the IEC office in Sharana by August 24.

-- Ghazni PEO reported that all polling centers have concluded ballot counts across the province. The PEO agreed to travel to FOB Ghazni to assist us with coordination on the retrieval of DFCs, vote tallies, and other appropriate election materials. He said voting materials for Khogyani, Rashidan and Zana Khan districts are ready for pick-up by ISAF.

-- Bamyan PRT representatives reporting 166 polling sites across Bamyan province. Stations opened on time and TOLO TV covered the opening. Voting lines were longest before noon and slowed significantly later in the day. Some of the hole punchers malfunctioned and officials improvised by using scissors. Polls closed an hour late at 5:00 and ballot sorting commenced at 6:30 PM.

Tally sheets are scheduled to be transferred from the province to Kabul during August 21-25.

-- The Laghman Provincial IEC representative reported to PRT that all ballots had been counted as of 11:00 a.m. on August 21. All ballots from Mehtarlam (except for those from one village) and all ballots from Qarghayi had already been returned to the IEC. Ballots from Dawlat Shah, Alingar, and Dawlat Shah are still on their way to

their respective district centers.

RC North:

-- Nothing new to report.

RC West:

-- Nothing new to report.

RC Central:

-- Nothing new to report.

Fraud

18. (SBU) Provincial reports by region follow:

RC South:

-- PRT Lashkar Gah reports there are strong indications of ballot stuffing in Musa Qala and Nad Ali, where in both instances vote counts spiked late in the day despite the streets in those DCs being nearly empty; the dubious votes are for Karzai.

RC East:

-- The Paktika ECC office reports that no formal complaints have been raised since polls closed and counting began.
-- Kapisa Province: Ballot Stuffing in Tagab district: A reliable source reported to TF Warrior that he visited the voting site prior to any voters coming in and the ballot boxes were already full. He specifically stated that no one had voted prior to these boxes being filled with counterfeit ballots. Our source said that officials have been alerted to the problem.

RC North:

-- Nothing new to report.

RC West:

-- Nothing new to report.

RC Central:

-- Nothing new to report.

Public Affairs

19. (U) NEW MESSAGING:

10. Have you seen reports that X campaign is announcing victory?

We've seen these reports, but only the IEC is in a position to announce official results. We'll be waiting to hear from them, and from the Electoral Complaints Commission. Anything else is just speculation at this point.

Background: Reuters and other major international newswires are reporting that Karzai's campaign has claimed victory in Thursday's election. Meanwhile, Abdullah Abdullah's campaign has also claimed to lead with 63 percent of the vote. The IEC has announced that "any result not announced by the IEC is unofficial, inaccurate and null and void."

10. Have you seen X report from X observer group?

Several observer groups will make statements over the next week. We are reviewing the report(s) as they come in. Observers play an important role in helping ensure a credible election. We appreciate their efforts in challenging circumstances. We look forward to hearing official results from the IEC.

The Afghan people should be commended for their courage in conducting this election despite the stresses of wartime, and the logistical challenges of carrying out an election in Afghanistan, and we and the international community are proud to support them.

The electoral process is now entering the critical phase of counting and verification of results.

It will be several days before we have preliminary results and we hope initial reports will refrain from speculation until results are announced. Final results - which will be certified only by the Independent Electoral Commission -- could take several weeks. We call on candidates and their supporters to behave responsibly during and after the elections.

The U.S. funded over 360 observers from independent international NGOs and from Embassy Kabul to observe the process. These U.S. funded observers were present in 29 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces.

10. (U) AFGHAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS:

-- The leading story in the Afghan media continues to coverage of the yesterday's press conference by President Karzai and the joint press conference by IEC, MOD, MOI, and NDS. Afghan media also continued to widely report on the reactions by the leaders of the international community to the Afghan elections day. (See Sitrep 11).

-- Tolo TV reported that there were two polling centers in Pul-e-Alam, the capital of Logar province, where only 1,000 people voted. The report also noted that women did not vote in Pul-e-Alam due to threats from the Taliban.

-- Radio Salam Watandar reported on security incidents. One coalition soldier was reportedly wounded by an IED explosion in Logar, while three ANP were wounded during a separate incident in Maidan Wardak province. The report also mentioned that five civilians were wounded when a rocket landed in Kunduz province.

-- Tolo TV continued to report that people under the age of 18 were seen voting for presidential and provincial council members in Bamiyan province.

-- Pajhwok News Agency reported that male voters in some districts and the capital city of Paktika province were allowed to cast ballots on behalf of their female family members due to the lack of separate arrangements for female voters.

EIKENBERRY